



Eastbourne Listening Tour 2022: Eastbourne Food Bank

March 2023

healthwatch
in Sussex

Introduction

Our rationale for a Listening Tour and engaging with service users at Eastbourne Food Bank

Healthwatch gather people's views of health and social care services in Sussex and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

Each year we focus on one area of East Sussex to engage with local people and understand their communities in more detail. For 2022 the Healthwatch East Sussex Listening Tour wanted to hear from residents in **Eastbourne**, from the **15th to the 30th October**.

Healthwatch East Sussex wanted to get every voice heard during the Listening Tour and this included individuals who use the Eastbourne Food Bank. With the numbers of service users at the Food Bank increasing we wanted to highlight the impacts on health and wellbeing for those potentially affected most by a rise in the cost of living.

The staff and volunteers at Eastbourne Foodbank were really welcoming of us and were encouraging of us returning to do similar engagement in the future.

Our aims:

- Raise the profile of Healthwatch amongst Food Bank service users, in particular making them aware of our Information and Signposting Service.
- Use the feedback gained to understand which local services are working well and which could be improved.
- Raise awareness of the health inequalities that exist for those on lower incomes.
- Get the voices heard of **everyone** within the community.

What we did and why we did it

Three staff members and one board member from Healthwatch East Sussex visited the Food Banks in Eastbourne Town Centre and Langney to engage with service users about their health and care experiences. We used our long and short Listening Tour surveys to see if there were common experiences amongst the service users and to learn what local services are working well and not so well. Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback via either a long or short survey which both covered the same themes, this provided those with less time the opportunity to also feedback.

Prior to our engagement we heard from Food Bank staff that two service users had pulled out their own teeth due to not being able to afford dental treatment. This piece of information led us to organising engagement activity at the Food Bank to discover what other issues may be impacting those on lower incomes.

It was also an opportunity to promote Healthwatch, our feedback centre and our Information and Signposting service so that service users could contact us if they need advice or guidance in the future.

We engaged with **24 people** in total, with **10 long survey** responses and **14 short survey** responses received. Those in attendance were happy to engage with us and welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback regarding local health and care services.




Comments about the Food Bank

“Food bank is very useful during cost of living crisis. Very helpful.”

“Foodbank in Hampden Park was amazing. Newcomers to town [town centre Food Bank] and there's not enough food for everyone.”

“They're [Food Bank] helpful and they listen and they try their best to help.”



Experiences of health and care services

Respondents talked about their individual experiences, but some of the most common themes mentioned were as follows:

- Six people talked about how they were **unable to get an appointment with their GP or dentist**. Access to GP appointments was a key issue, with several people expressing frustrations about long queues. If unable to get appointments, medical conditions are left untreated, and people's anxiety increases of not knowing what to do if they have a health issue and can't get help.
- Five people mentioned that they had **had positive experiences with their doctor**. Some people had always had a great service and praised health and care services for the job they are doing despite well documented pressures.
- Five people told us that they had **bad experiences of trying to call their GP surgery**, either
 - waiting a long time on the phone or being treated poorly by reception staff.



Experiences of health and care services

“Dentist has been really bad. Was taken off the list after I missed an appointment due to being in hospital. Wasn’t told I was off the list until I went back to make an appointment and have been left with no help and unable to find another dentist. So have pulled 5 of my own teeth out including wisdom teeth.”

“My doctor is amazing- he listens to me and sometimes I just need reassurance of my condition.”

“The telephone queues take up too much credit on mobile phone so cant always wait.”



How confident do you currently feel about accessing health or care services when you need them?

23 of 24 respondents answered this question:

Very Confident- 17%

Quite Confident- 48%

Unsure- 13%

Not confident at all- 22%

Positive comments:

"They always provide a service. If doctor isn't available, they will find someone else."

"My doctor is so good."

Neutral comments:

"GP has been good despite long phone queues to initially get through. Hospital have been terrible."

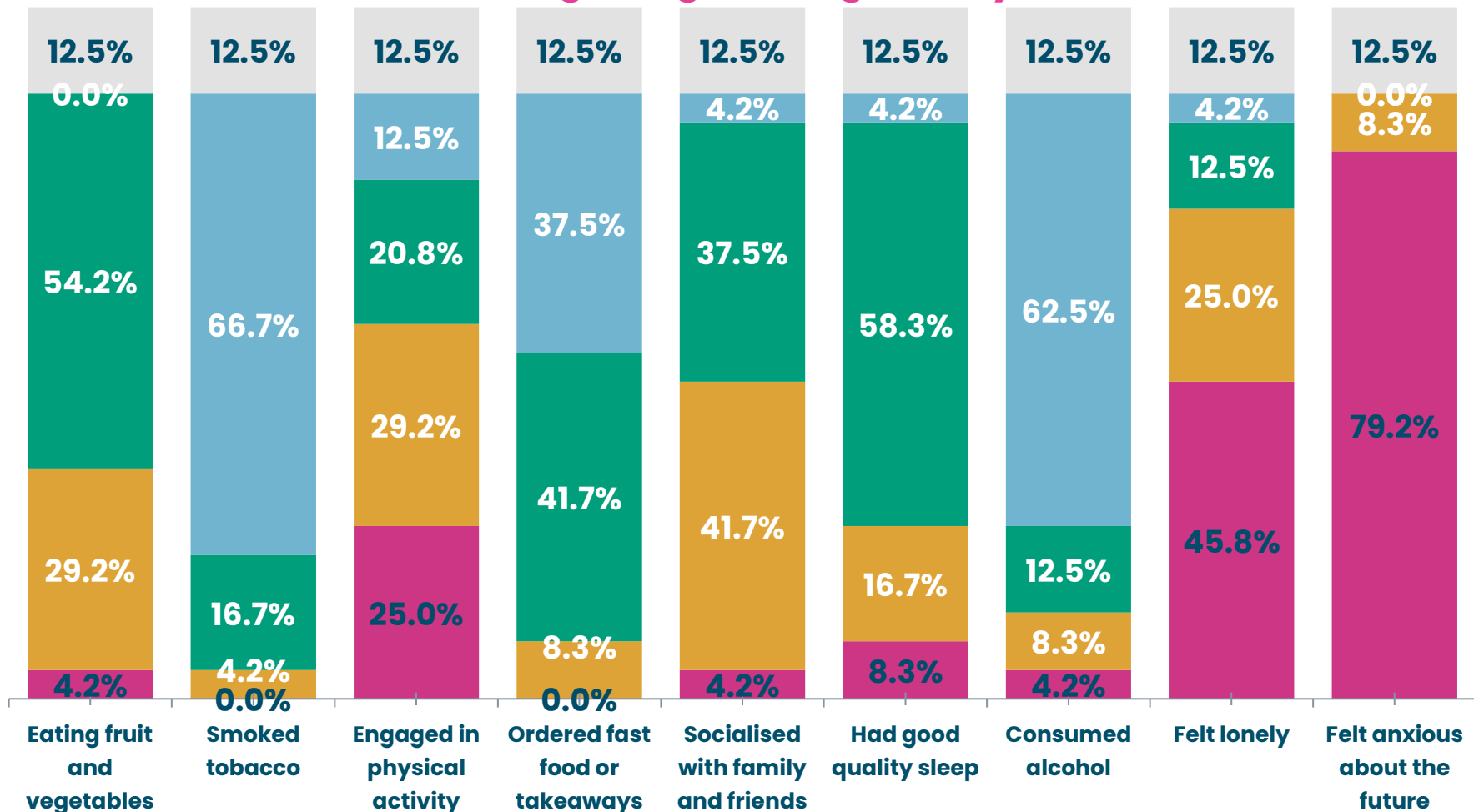
"Good experience with recent Dr appointment, but still waiting for operation."

Negative comments:

"There is no communication with services, they don't explain things so I don't know what's going on."

"Just can't get a dentist"

Since the 'Cost of Living' crisis began, have any of the following things changed for you?



■ More often
 ■ About the same
 ■ Less often
 ■ Not applicable
 ■ No response

Since the 'Cost of Living' crisis began, have any of the following things changed for you?


Part of the long and short survey was to understand people's everyday health and wellbeing, so we wanted to understand the impact of the rising cost of living and especially those who use community services like the Food Bank.

We heard from 21 people who answered this question:

- **79.2% of respondents feel anxious about the future more often**
- **58.3% of respondents have good quality sleep left often**
- **54.2% of respondents are eating fruit and vegetables less often.**
- **45.8% of respondents feel lonely more often**
- It is clear from the responses to this question that the Cost-of-Living crisis is having a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of those on lower incomes, causing them to change their habits, and feel more alone and anxious about the future.

Since the 'Cost of Living' crisis began, have any of the following things changed for you?

- People told us that they want to try to help themselves and maintain good health and wellbeing, but they are struggling due to the current cost of living situation, as well as the difficulties with accessing services, which is clearly impacting on their mental health and wellbeing.
- People spoke about the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis, with one person saying she was unable to buy herself a winter coat as she needs to feed her children, even though she works part time as a dental hygiene nurse. Engaging with people accessing the Food Bank really highlighted how the cost-of-living crisis is having a disproportionate, and severe impact on those on low incomes.
- Others were clearly distressed that their health and wellbeing (including financial situation) had deteriorated rapidly over the past 9 months and expressed how this was impacting negatively on their mental health.
- ***“Food bank is very useful during cost-of-living crisis. Very helpful.”***



If you could change one thing to improve your health and wellbeing, what would it be?

“Access to Doctors”

“Money- to enable me not to worry.”

“Making sure we all have everything we need.”

“Clear communication from the government about what is happening and how to budget.”

“Make government practice good and care for all with a proper policy in place.”

“More money - would be able to get out and go to more places.”

“Making more friends”



Where would you most like to see improvements to health?

Whilst the 23 people who responded to this question wanted to see improvements in various areas of health and care including ambulance services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, health visitors, pharmacies and hospitals, the most commonly occurring answers were as follows:

- 6 people answered that they wanted improved GP services.
- 5 people wanted to see improvements in dental services
- 3 people wanted to see increased funding.
- 3 people answered that there should be more staff.

6 Where would you most like to see improvements to health and care services?

“Mental Health staff not very skilled (community and hospital based) superficial and patronizing.”

“Prescription charges are currently too expensive. Don't always buy despite having a serious condition. Do I get medication or do I get food”

“More regular access to GP and less delay in seen GP/ reduce waiting time.”

“More funding to increase appointments available.”

“More appointments and easier access. More NHS Dentists.”

Recommendations

- NHS commissioners need to make more dentists or emergency provision available in Eastbourne for those who cannot get appointments so that residents do not have ongoing dental problems or even resort to pulling out their own teeth.
- GP surgeries should reduce the waiting times for patients calling to make an appointment and should review the training they give to reception staff to improve the treatment towards patients.
- The NHS and local voluntary groups should do more to promote their services and work with other local organisations which can support those on lower incomes. This will help resident's anxiety to reduce and improve their general wellbeing.
- Healthwatch East Sussex will continue to promote its Information and Signposting Service to service users at the Food Bank and will arrange further Information and Signposting drop-in sessions in 2023 to further support people to access health and care services to support their wellbeing.
- Healthwatch East Sussex should review how the Cost-of-Living crisis will have impacted the health and wellbeing of those using the Food Bank and revisit the Food Banks in Eastbourne in 6 months to see if there are improvements. We would use the same questions and add new questions that may be relevant after 6 months.
- Eastbourne Food Bank should have discussions with Healthwatch East Sussex on how we can collaborate further.

For more information

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